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For More Information Contact

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Shannon N. Marshall, VDH PIO (804) 864-7963

FIGHT THE BITE: PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST THE ASIAN TIGER MOSQUITO BY REMOVING CONTAINERS FROM AROUND YOUR HOME

National Mosquito Control Awareness Week is June 25-July 1

(RICHMOND, Va.)—Many people in Virginia think a mosquito is just a mosquito. In fact, more than 55 mosquito species are native to Virginia. State health officials have been paying close attention to the Asian tiger mosquito, a non-native mosquito that was first found in Virginia in 1992 and has become one of the most significant yard pests over the last decade. As part of National Mosquito Control Awareness Week, June 25 – July 1, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is coordinating with the Virginia Mosquito Control Association (VMCA) and other partners to raise awareness about the Asian tiger mosquito and mosquito-borne diseases.

Asian tiger mosquitoes are smaller than most other species, and are jet black with bright white stripes on their legs and a thin white “racing stripe” down the back of their thorax. They are most active during the daylight hours, and tend to fly low where they can bite ankles, legs and arms. They are known to be able to transmit West Nile virus and La Crosse virus as well as several tropical mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue.

While most people associate mosquitoes with stagnant ponds, puddles and ditches, the Asian tiger mosquito is referred to as a “container breeder.” It breeds exclusively in water that accumulates in containers and these habitats are usually found around homes. The best way to reduce the number of tiger mosquitoes in your yard is to dump accumulated water found in containers on a weekly basis. If the water can’t be dumped, put a larvicide mosquito dunk or larvicide pellets in the water. Asian tiger mosquitoes are known to breed in water that accumulates in buckets, tires, potted plant trays, plastic cups, toys, plastic downspout extensions, roof gutters, boats, bird baths, depressions and water pockets on plastic tarps, neglected ornamental ponds, containers stored under wooden decks, wheelbarrows, flooded garbage cans, tree knot holes and any number of other types of containers.

“By highlighting the Asian tiger mosquito during National Mosquito Control Awareness Week, we hope residents will clear their yards of the containers of water that Asian tiger mosquitoes and several other mosquito species can breed in,” said David Gaines, Ph.D., entomologist with the Division of Zoonotic and Environmental Epidemiology.

Mosquitoes can carry and spread diseases such as West Nile virus, eastern equine encephalitis, La Crosse encephalitis, and St. Louis encephalitis. Cases of malaria, another mosquito-borne disease, have also been reported in Virginia. However, malaria is more commonly found among people who have recently traveled to tropical countries where it is prevalent.

Most people bitten by mosquitoes do not get sick, even if the mosquito is infected with a virus. Most people who do get sick usually suffer a mild flu-like illness. However, people over the age of 50 are at greatest risk of serious illness, such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord).

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The best way to control mosquitoes is by eliminating their breeding places.

Protect your family this summer by following these simple precautions:

- Wear long, loose and light-colored clothing.
- If possible, stay indoors when mosquitoes are biting.
- Use insect repellent with the smallest percentage of DEET necessary for the length of time you are exposed to mosquitoes, but no more than 50 percent for adults and 10 percent for children under 12.
- Turn over or remove from your yard containers where water collects, such as old tires, potted plant trays, buckets and toys.
- Eliminate standing water on tarps or flat roofs.
- Clean out birdbaths and wading pools once a week.
- Clean roof gutters and downspout screens.

For more information about mosquito-borne diseases, visit VDH at www.vdh.virginia.gov and click on "Mosquito-Borne Diseases," or log on to VMCA's Web site at www.mosquito-va.org

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